

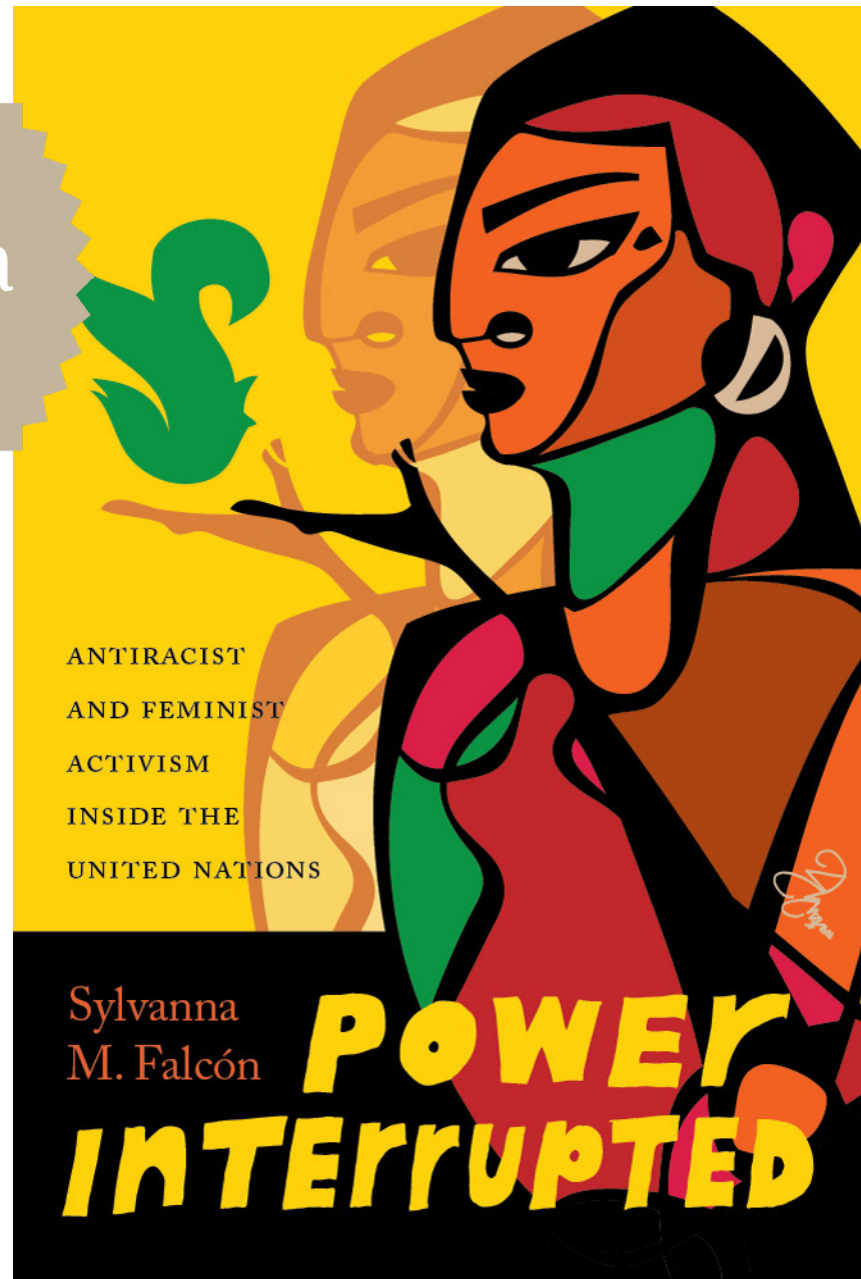
Power Interrupted

INSTRUCTOR'S GUIDE

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Gloria E.
Anzaldúa
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In ***Power Interrupted: Antiracist and Feminist Activism inside the United Nations***, Sylvanna M. Falcón offers an analysis of intersectionality, a theory that explains the inter-relationship of race and gender, and transnational feminism, an analysis that advances a relational understanding of social issues like racism. Falcón's book explores the importance of intersectionality and transnational feminism within UN antiracism venues, in contrast to the UN forums exclusively focused on women. In particular, the 2001 World Conference against Racism, Racial Discrimination, Xenophobia, and Related Intolerance in Durban, South Africa, provided a critical new opportunity for transnational feminist organizing on intersectionality that continues to this present day.

For decades, the global discourse about racism had primarily elevated men's experiences with racial injustice. Falcón argues this pattern shifted in 2001 when feminist activists worked to expand the debates about global racism. Using a combination of in-depth interviews, participant observation, and extensive archival data, Falcón situates contemporary antiracist feminist organizing from the Americas—specifically the activism by feminists of color from the United States and Canada, and feminists from México and Perú—alongside a critical historical reading of the UN and its agenda against racism.

Ultimately, ***Power Interrupted*** is a reminder that feminist struggle is everywhere, and that solving racism requires a holistic and relational approach that accounts for gender. Falcón encourages us to heed the lessons from this time as the human rights struggle against racism continues today, and as democracies throughout the world, including in the United States, experience an unprecedented assault shaped by global white and patriarchal supremacy.



Sylvanna M. Falcón is an Associate Professor of Latin American and Latino Studies at UC Santa Cruz. She is an award-winning author and teacher, and the co-editor of ***Precarity and Belonging: Labor, Migration, and Noncitizenship*** (2021) and ***New Directions in Feminism and Human Rights*** (2011).

Learn more about Dr. Falcón's research at www.sylvannafalcon.com

INTRODUCTION (PAGES 3-31)

The Challenging Road to the Durban Conference



Summary:

This introductory chapter addresses the history that preceded the 2001 World Conference Against Racism, Racial Discrimination, Xenophobia, and Related Intolerance in Durban, South Africa (WCAR). This history includes comparing and contrasting the lead up to the 1995 World Conference on Women in Beijing, China and the tensions embedded in the discourse of global sisterhood. This chapter also defines keywords and frameworks including intersectionality, transnational feminism, and geopolitical power. The objective of this chapter is to provide the foundation for the remainder of the book.

Questions for Discussion:

- 1 Why must an analysis about women's marginalized social condition account for racism?
- 2 Falcón talks about three factors shaping the strategic context for social movement work when focusing on antiracism forums instead of the ones exclusively about women. What are those three factors? Why is it important to understand the strategic context for organizing?
- 3 The chapter discusses the fraught relationship between white feminists and women of color feminists. Why is it important to acknowledge this history, rather than privilege a narrative of unified global sisterhood?
- 4 Falcón discusses how the global agenda against racism had been primarily male-centric until 2001. Do you agree or disagree based on what you read in the introduction?
- 5 Falcón focuses on transnational and antiracist feminist activism from Canada, the United States, México, and Perú. Have you heard of any transnational and antiracist feminist activism in other countries? What injustice(s) were they working to overcome?

CHAPTER 1 (PAGES 32-62)

Race, Gender, & Geopolitics in the Establishment of the UN



Summary:

This chapter provides a brief history of the United Nations Conference on International Organization (UNCIO) that led to the establishment of the United Nations (UN) in April 1945. UNCIO took place in San Francisco, California, and women had organized a parallel conference called the United Women's Conference (UWC), focused on women's role in the peace-making process following the devastation of World War II. Recognizing that those early deliberations at UNCIO reflect an exertion of colonial and patriarchal power, this chapter also highlights how less powerful countries, specifically from Latin America, challenged powerful countries in their quest to form a more democratic UN. Further, the chapter discusses how the UWC became a way to advance women's representation at the global level even though it was an imperfect venue. Noting that only four women delegates signed the UN Charter (i.e., the UN's founding document) out of 160 signatories, this chapter argues that two of these four delegates, Bertha Lutz of Brazil and Minerva Bernardino of the Dominican Republic, laid the important groundwork for gender equality at the UN.

Questions for Discussion:

- 1 Falcón cites Walter Mignolo's argument about how the concept of "human" excluded most people in the world in 1945. What is the significance of making such a provocation and how does this exclusion impact the meaning of "human rights" in those early years?
- 2 The chapter discusses the power of the veto in the UN Security Council, the most important committee at the UN. How does the veto power reinscribe geopolitical power and which countries benefit from having this power?
- 3 Falcón uses Cynthia Enloe's concept of "reading power backward and forward" for analyzing UNCIO and other global dynamics. In what ways does "reading power backward and forward" provide a method in which to notice how constituencies or communities viewed as lacking power are resisting oppression?
- 4 The formation of the UN Trusteeship Council was embedded in racist, colonial, and sexist logics. In what ways do these logics appear in the debates covered in the chapter? Do you think these sentiments still exist today?
- 5 Every word is deliberately chosen when it comes to official UN documents because these documents establish precedents and norms. Why is it important to be intentional about word choice and why is it worth advocating for the inclusion of certain new words when establishing precedents and norms?
- 6 Assembling a diverse and representative group across genders, geographies, languages, races, ethnicities, and so forth at decision-making tables is very important. How did representation (or the lack thereof) impact decisions or outcomes of UNCIO and UWC?

CHAPTER 2 (PAGES 63-97)

UN Citizenship and Constellations of Human Rights



Summary:

The first part of this chapter advances this concept of “UN citizenship” to explore the different levels of engagement in this multilateral space by countries and accredited non-governmental organizations (NGOs) based on economic, social, and cultural capital. The second part of this chapter considers how the very meaning and understanding of human rights varies as a result of modernist and relational ontologies. Falcón advances three constellations of human rights in the second part of this chapter: dominant, counterpublic, and social praxis. The purpose of this chapter is to provide readers with an understanding of the human rights landscape for activists as shaped by UN citizenship and the constellations, arguing that the social praxis constellation is the space in which race-gender intersectionality theory emerged at the UN.

Questions for Discussion:

- 1 When large institutions or organizations grow over decades, why would it be important to revisit and maybe even revise the way work is accomplished in that space?
- 2 Even when multiple communities have the same type of citizenship (such as legal citizenship tied to nationality), their rights are not always equally respected or upheld. Why is it important to study how communities with the same type of citizenship, such as the UN citizenship discussed in this chapter, are not treated equitably? What does that tell you about the flaws of the concept of citizenship overall?
- 3 When an NGO secures UN accreditation, they are entitled to participate in certain UN processes. What did you learn about the UN accreditation process and how some NGOs can be disadvantaged by it?
- 4 Falcón puts forth three constellations of human rights in this chapter. Discuss each one and why the social praxis constellation is the space for the “social life of rights.”

CHAPTER 3 (PAGES 98-126)

A Genealogy of World Conferences Against Racism and the Progression of Intersectionality



Summary:

This chapter focuses specifically on the three WCARs and their outcomes from 1978, 1983, and 2001. Each of the conferences involves a preparatory period up to two years prior to the conference, plus follow-up conferences. Falcón analyzes the conference documents, as well as the political games played by select governments, like the United States, that never wanted these conferences to take place anyway. The US government engaged in a dramatic “walkout” of the 2001 WCAR, which Falcón describes as performative since the US delegation did not follow official procedures for conference withdrawal. In the end, the three conferences were extremely contentious and controversial.

Questions for Discussion:

- 1 Each world conference produces a declaration and a programme of action by its conclusion. Why is it important to analyze these official conference documents independently as well as together? In what ways does reviewing the three documents show progress as well as stalemates on certain issues?
- 2 South Africa was a major focus of the first two WCARs. What do you know about South African apartheid? If you don't know much about it, take some time to learn about South African apartheid and why it garnered so much global attention for decades.
- 3 Why would the US government claim they wanted to participate in the WCAR when their actions indicated otherwise?
- 4 The third WCAR in 2001 was significant given how much time had passed since the second WCAR in 1983. How do you think global discourse and progress is hampered by having so many years pass between world conferences?
- 5 Why do you think there have not been calls for a fourth WCAR now that over two decades have passed since the third one? Do you think it would be important to have another global gathering to debate racism and racial discrimination? What new subjects do you think would enter the conversation?

CHAPTER 4 (PAGES 127-151)

Making the Intersectional Connections



Summary:

This chapter discusses how the global progress made on incorporating an intersectionality perspective at the 2001 WCAR involved a couple of years of advocacy and organizing prior to the conference. Antiracist feminists began to fortify their networks, both real and symbolic, at this time. By having the time to prepare in advance for the 2001 WCAR, activists could then think strategically about the types of interventions and outcomes they wanted in order to benefit various marginalized constituencies back home. UN world conferences are key moments for global activists as it provides them a clear focus in which they can have the attention of government delegations. However, as discussed in the previous chapters, power is not equitably distributed. Thus, Falcón addresses how the breadth of US power impacted antiracist feminist organizing, as well as how the other countries included in this research (Canada, México, and Perú) had their own national dynamics to contend with in which discussions about racism were fraught and challenging for different reasons than the United States.

Questions for Discussion:

- 1 Advocating for an expanded approach to the meaning of racism by using intersectionality means that new issues can then enter the debate or deliberations. How do we benefit from this expanded approach? How does it help us be more inclusive of other lived experiences?
- 2 Discuss the political challenges feminists had to deal within their respective countries when it comes to racism. Compare and contrast these political challenges from the four national contexts.
- 3 Falcón argues in this chapter that feminists “recast locally based issues in ways that aligned with their goals of building broader transnational alliances” (p. 150). Why is important to always keep the dynamics of the local and global in mind when engaged in organizing at the global level?
- 4 By acknowledging that gender discrimination impacts racism and vice versa, then women’s social conditions can be addressed more comprehensively than before. How does this acknowledgement benefit men as well?

CHAPTER 5 (PAGES 152-165)

Intersectionality as the New Universalism



Summary:

This final chapter argues that moving from an unsustainable or unrealistic idea of global sisterhood towards transnational feminism recognizes that multiple types of feminist engagement and tension can exist at the same time at the UN. The type of feminism explored in this book occurred in the UN forums focused on the eradication of global racism. This context provided the opening in which intersectionality could take hold in the early 2000s, establishing new precedents that later generations of activists can build upon.

Questions for Discussion:

- 1 Do you think establishing new precedents at the UN is important for future activism? Explain your answer.
- 2 Describe in your own words what is meant by the “new universalism of intersectionality.” If universalism can lead to erasures, how does intersectionality minimize this invisibility from happening?
- 3 Why is it important to have access to an international entity when domestic governments fail their people? Did you find some of the reasons that feminist interviewees gave for remaining engaged at the UN compelling?
- 4 Even though the UN is an imperfect institution, is there value in continuing to work, advocate, and even agitate, from within this flawed organization? Why or why not?



Reflection Questions

- 1 The late bell hooks, a feminist cultural critic, said “feminism is for everybody” because feminism applies to all genders and all social injustices are feminist concerns. How is the term feminist or feminism discussed today in popular culture, on social media, by mainstream media, by politicians, or even your peers? Is it positive or negative, as a form of empowerment or as something to be suspicious of or be against?
- 2 Is there a risk of missing important knowledge, awareness, and insights when we don’t consider an intersectionality approach to a social issue or subject? Why or why not?
- 3 Why do you think it is so difficult and contentious to discuss racism at the local, national, and global levels? Discuss the challenges at all three levels and whether or not you think the tensions increase when addressing racism globally.
- 4 When universalism is used interchangeably with sameness, then it suggests we all have to be treated the same regardless of culture. Discuss how “intersectionality as the new universalism” is different than universalism as sameness.



Additional Activities or Assignments

- 1 Read the Universal Declaration of Human Rights (UDHR) and discuss what surprised you about the document. Then select up to 5 articles to update or propose up to 5 new articles to add to the UDHR. Keep in mind that these updates or proposals have to be legible or understood by all people around the world. Provide a brief explanation for your updates or proposals.

Link: <https://www.un.org/en/about-us/universal-declaration-of-human-rights>
(last access August 2022)

- 2 Read the Women's March Unity Principles. Brainstorm and create your own Unity Principles about subjects that are important to you.

Link: <https://www.womensmarchmn.com/unity-principles>
(last access August 2022)

- 3 Select a publication to review from the UN's Office of High Commissioner for Human Rights that interests you. Note the year of the publication and whether or not intersectionality has been included in some capacity in the publication.

Link: <https://www.ohchr.org/en/publications>
(last access August 2022)

- 4 Practice "reading power backward and forward." Select a social justice issue and discuss the various ways power is present, as a form of oppression and as a form of resistance.

- 5 Read the Appendix (p. 167) from the book that contains the email the US government sent US NGOs during the preparatory period of the 2001 WCAR. The email is urging US NGOs to look forward to the future, and less to the past. Is this possible when discussing racism in the United States or even around the world. Why or why not?